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ABSTRACT

A 3-year control study was conducted to determine whether the use of self-esteem program materials could have a significant impact on staff or student self-esteem and functioning within the school setting. The study used three experimental schools and three control schools. Teachers in the three experimental schools were provided orientation, training, and supervision in the use of materials from the Building Self-Esteem Program. Annual evaluations were conducted in February using measures of general and academic self-esteem together with measures of the learning environment. The results showed that significant improvements could be achieved in the general climate of the school, in the manner in which adults related to children, in the behaviors displayed by the students, in the quality of the interpersonal relationships among the staff, and in the level of student self-esteem. There was general agreement in all three experimental schools that there were more cooperation; less anti-social behavior; fewer students being referred for disciplinary action; less absenteeism; more students involved in school activities; more positive leadership; and more highly motivated students in the classroom. Teacher self-esteem proved to be a very important factor in the effort to build student self-esteem. Teachers in the experimental schools reported feeling more competent as teachers and gained more satisfaction through their teaching. (Author/NB)

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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM:
IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT SUMMARY

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BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT SUMMARY

A three year control study was conducted to determine whether the use of self-esteem program materials could have a significant impact on staff or student self-esteem and their functioning within the school setting. The results of the study showed that significant improvements could be achieved in the general climate of the school, in the manner in which adults relate to children, in the behaviors displayed by the students, in the quality of the interpersonal relationships among the staff, and in the level of student self-esteem.

There was general agreement in all three schools that there was more cooperative action in the classroom and on the playground; there was less anti-social behavior displayed; fewer students were referred for disciplinary action; there was less absenteeism; more students were involved in school activities; more positive leadership was demonstrated, and students were reported to be more motivated in the classroom.

Teacher self-esteem proved to be a very important factor in the effort to build student self-esteem. Teacher responses showed they felt more secure in their roles and responsibilities at school; they displayed more trust with their principals and colleagues; they perceived inservice sessions more positively; they shared materials and ideas more freely with others; they displayed greater concern for others; felt more cohesive as a group and shared common goals more thoroughly. Of greatest importance, they reported feeling more competent as teachers and gained more satisfaction through their teaching.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM
IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT SUMMARY
1982-1985

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BACKGROUND

A three year control study was initiated in 1982 using three control schools and three experimental schools. The purpose of the study was to determine whether the use of the Building Self-Esteem Program would have a significant impact on staff or student self-esteem and their functioning within the school. The teachers in the three target, or experimental, schools were provided orientation, training, and supervision in the use of the materials. Evaluations were conducted once each year in February using measures of general and academic self-esteem together with measures of the learning environment. All three schools served communities that ranged from middle to low socio-economic levels. The percentage of minorities in three target schools ranged from 40% to 98%.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The difficulties in implementing and managing a school-wide effort to improve school climate, especially in low functioning schools was exemplified in this study. The project was affected by several factors beyond the control of the study, yet factors that are typical in many schools. First, all three experimental schools were selected by their superintendents or building principals as schools in particular need of climate changes, rather than on the basis of teacher initiation. This proved to be a major limiting factor in at least one of the three experimental schools where staff resentments about not having been consulted regarding their involvement in the project remained a limiting factor throughout the three year period. This resulted in reduced motivation and resistance to staff training sessions and use of suggestions given. Yet, even in this school, in spite of the resistance the staff reported that the project had a positive impact upon the general climate of the school.

Second, all three schools were considered by their staffs to be among the less desirable schools in which to teach, and most of the teachers had an explanation as to why they had been assigned to their particular school. Many felt they were assigned to that school because they were considered to be less effective as teachers. Others had been transferred to their school because of difficulties they had had in other schools.

Third, after the project began, changes in administration occurred in four of the six schools, making continuity and implementation difficult. The disruption caused by such changes illustrated how difficult it is to sustain school reform with frequent administrative changes.

In contrast to the depressed attitudes on the part of staff members in the three experimental schools, the three control schools volunteered to participate in the study because of the staff interest in the area of self-esteem. In two of the three comparison schools programs had already been initiated to strengthen student attitudes, steps which continued throughout the study. Thus although they were considered to be comparison schools, their programs did not remain static throughout the three year period.

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

All of the target schools displayed significant gains in academic self-esteem when measured by BASE, an instrument designed to assess self-esteem on the basis of observed behavior. Thus, it was evident that students behaved differently as a result of the use of the program. According to the perceptions of teachers in the three target schools, the gains made in two of the three schools were significant at the .01 level and the gains in the third were significant at the .05 level.

There was general agreement in all three schools that there was more cooperative action in the classroom and on the playground; there was less anti-social behavior displayed; fewer students were referred for disciplinary action; there was less absenteeism; more students were involved in school activities; more positive leadership was demonstrated, and students were reported to be more motivated in the classroom.

It appeared that in the target schools the students increased their alertness to the learning environment, a primary factor in the growth shown in their academic self-esteem. The students' initiative, or their willingness to involve themselves in the learning activities, appeared to be the next most important factor.

However, none of the three target schools displayed significant gains in student self-estimates of their esteem as measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). One possible reason for this result is that on this instrument students compare their perceptions with others within their class, so that there may always be a constant percentage of students who see themselves as less confident than others in their classroom, even though the general level of functioning of the class improves. A second possible explanation might be the inclusion of several items in this instrument that reflect attitudes in the home, where the BASE instrument focuses only on the school environment. A third explanation might be that it may be possible to change behaviors associated with self-esteem, but more difficult to change the basic perceptions children hold of themselves.

Staff Self-Esteem

Teacher self-esteem proved to be a very important factor in the effort to build student self-esteem. Informally, through the interactions of the principals and staffs at the schools, it became evident rather early in the project that teachers were the key to improving the self-esteem of the students. Through the efforts of the project staff and by working with the school administrators the staffs began to create more positive environments for themselves and make more positive evaluations of their schools and their relationships with other staff members. By the end of the project, all of the three schools had shown increases in teacher self-esteem, and the gains were highly significant statistically.

Teacher responses showed they felt more secure in their roles and responsibilities at school; they displayed more trust with their principals and colleagues; they perceived inservice sessions more positively; they shared materials and ideas more freely with others; they displayed greater concern for others; felt more cohesive as a group and shared common goals more thoroughly. Of greatest importance, they reported feeling more competent as teachers and gained more satisfaction through their teaching. The three target schools were unanimous in their responses that the general school climate was the number one area where the project had its major impact. The Building Self-Esteem Teacher's Manual was reported to be of greatest value in achieving this change. When asked if they would recommend the program to other schools, over 85% responded positively.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that through the combined use of the Building Self-Esteem materials and staff development activities, significant improvements could be achieved in the general climate of the school, in the manner in which adults relate to children, in the behaviors displayed by the students, in the quality of the interpersonal relationships among the staff, and in the level of student self-esteem, as measured by the Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem instrument. However, there was no evidence that basic self-esteem, as measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory, was affected as a result of the project.